

It is so good to be here today with all of you.

I want to thank the University of Minnesota for hosting this conference and extending me an invitation to speak. Thanks to Deb Swackhamer and her colleagues at the Water Resources Center. And most importantly, I want to thank all of you. Everyone in this room works incredibly hard to protect Minnesota's water, and our state and country are better for it.

Water is one of my favorite issues. Maybe that is because I'm a Minnesotan, and water is so central to our shared experience and culture. From the Mississippi River to Lake Superior to our 12,000 lakes - this state is blessed with water resources.

Minnesotans understand that when we talk about water, we are talking about the most basic, essential component to sustaining life. And when we talk about clean water, we are talking about public trust. Because when a mother turns on the tap to fill a bottle for her child, she is trusting that water is clean and safe. Ensuring her trust is a great responsibility - a responsibility that everyone in this room shares - including me.

In the past 40 years we have taken great strides as a country to earn that trust and we have made enormous gains toward cleaning up our rivers, lakes and streams. But in 2009, we find many of those gains are at risk. People across the country and in Washington are beginning to realize something you have always known - the fight for clean water is not over.

Today I am going to talk about the fight that lies ahead.

The Clean Water Act passed in 1972. I was a senior in high school then and I still remember what life was like during the pollution free-for-all prior to that landmark law. I remember seeing Swift & Amour employees dump animal carcasses into the Mississippi River in South St. Paul. I remember what the River smelled like back then. It was bad, but that's how it had always been.

The Clean Water Act represented a turning point for our country. That law - along with the Clean Air Act - was the beginning of a new era of awareness about the value of natural resources and the need for environmental stewardship. But turning points don't come easily. Let's not forget that a river in Ohio had to actually catch fire before we took action. But Congress did Act and with dramatic results. For the first time, we began monitoring the

pollution levels in our water.

We required permits for polluting, and as a result we vastly reduced direct industrial pollutant discharges into our rivers, lakes and streams. The federal government made wastewater treatment a priority for the first time. From 1970 to 1995, we invested \$61 billion to bring access to wastewater treatment plants to 35 percent more Americans.

These are dramatic changes in a very short period of time. But these improvements did not happen because Congress passed a bill - that was just the beginning. America's rivers, lakes, and streams became cleaner because we made clean water a priority: a priority for funding, for research, and for enforcement.

Unfortunately, priorities changed in Washington. For years, the federal government invested time, attention and resources in a massive national push for clean water. Then we declared victory.

Federal funding for clean water programs was cut. Before long, enforcement of clean water policies began to lag in many states. The work continued, but with far fewer resources than needed - everyone in this room knows that struggle. As a result, Americans today have a great law that is only half-implemented.

We face new threats to water quality that were not envisioned in the original Clean Water Act, and we have a full-blown public health crisis because government at all levels has failed to protect the drinking water that families across this country depend on. The unfinished business of the Clean Water Act begins with agriculture. It is no secret that agricultural runoff is the number one cause of water pollution in this country. The nitrogen and phosphorus that wash off farm fields in our state created a "dead zone" in the Gulf the size of Massachusetts.

Closer to home, the harmful bacteria in manure fertilizer pollutes our streams and groundwater. And then there are the dangers of atrazine - a widely used herbicide associated with birth defects and premature births. This is not a new issue - I was debating atrazine in the State Legislature back in the 1990s. Year after year, bills to ban atrazine are introduced in Minnesota but never get close to the Governor's desk. The time for action on atrazine is long-overdue. The science is known, the threat is real, atrazine must be banned.

Agriculture is a vital part of Minnesota's economy and culture. And I have always been a strong supporter of Minnesota's farm families. I am here to tell you that it is possible to be a supporter of agriculture AND also be an advocate for clean water. We know there are solutions and compromises to be found at the point where the farm field meets the stream - or better yet, the buffer strip. Minnesota will never achieve its clean water goals if we fail to recognize and address the environmental impacts of large-scale farming operations.

Agriculture is only part of the "non-point source" pollution challenge. We cannot ignore the thousands of "straight-pipe" septic systems across our state. Controlling nonpoint sources is much harder than building a single waste-water treatment plant. It is harder practically and it is harder politically.

But this is the unfinished business of the Clean Water Act. One of our tasks is to build the political will necessary for action. It turns out none of our work on the Clean Water Act was a "finished" as we thought.

In a recent series of articles called "Toxic Waters," the *New York Times* reported that in the last 5 years, over 23,000 chemical factories, manufacturing plants, and other industries have violated water pollution laws. Records show the Clean Water Act has been violated by these companies over half a million times. And we are not talking about minor infractions. About 60 percent of the industrial polluters were in "significant noncompliance." That category includes dumping cancer-causing chemicals.

Until this year, the problem was spiraling out of control. From 2004 to 2007, the number of violations of the Clean Water Act grew by more than 16 percent. How did things get so bad so fast? Because ideology had a grip on Washington. The Bush Administration believed that less regulation was always better. They let private sector police itself.

Last fall, Wall Street proved that approach was wrong. The poisoning of America's water proves that approach is dangerous. For 8 years, the Environmental Protection Agency was not allowed to do its job. EPA records show that less than 3 percent of companies that violated the Clean Water Act received any punishment at all in the last 5 years. Federal funding was cut, staffing levels fell, and pressure on State officials to act was eased. In a few short years, the safeguards this country worked so hard to establish crumbled.

This wasn't a mistake. It wasn't even negligence. It was policy.

Let me read you a quote from an EPA official anonymously quoted by the *New York Times*: We were told to take our clean water and clean air cases, put them in a box and lock it shut. Everyone knew polluters were getting away with murder. But these polluters are some of the biggest campaign contributors in town, so no one really cared if they were dumping poisons into streams."

Through a combination of corruption and distraction, a public health crisis has emerged in this country.

- Last year, 40 percent of the community water systems in America violated the federal Safe Drinking Water Act.
- 22 million people receive drinking water from municipal systems that violated a health-based standard.
- An estimated 19.5 million Americans are getting sick every year from drinking water contaminated with parasites, bacteria, or viruses.
- And many people are drinking poisoned water that may someday cause cancer, birth defects or neurological disorders.

This is happening to Americans - our fellow citizens - in 2009!

Some of the pollutants doing us harm are well known. Others are new, and fall into the category of "contaminants of emerging concern." The University of Minnesota is a leading research center in this area. While the health effects of many of these contaminants are unclear, what

we do know is very unsettling.

A recent study by the US Geological Survey found that 73 percent of the smallmouth bass collected in the Mississippi River near Lake City had sexual abnormalities. We're talking about male fish with eggs right here in Minnesota. That is just plain scary.

There is a water quality crisis in this country threatening all of us in ways we don't even understand. If we fail to reverse these trends, what is our wake-up call going to look like? Do we need to see sexual abnormalities in boys and girls before we get serious?

The list of problems competing for attention and dollars in Washington, DC and in St. Paul is long. It is convenient for us to see clean water as something we got right years ago - something we have checked off our list. But you and I know it doesn't work that way. Clean water requires work every day, every month, every year. It must always be a priority because we cannot live without it. Unfortunately that's a lesson this country is going to have to learn at least twice in my lifetime.

I believe in second-chances, so let us begin again. We have to start by re-establishing clean water a national priority. A priority for funding, for research and for enforcement at all levels of government. And we have to start thinking about water in new ways.

That means putting an end to making water policy in isolation from air quality, land management and climate change. The natural environment is an inter-connected system. Our environmental policies are doomed to fail when our policies fail to connect. For example, installing scrubbers in the smokestacks of coal plants was one of the most effective strategies for reducing air pollution in the past 40 years. But the clean air people were not talking to the clean water people. Instead of releasing toxic waste into the air, coal plants started dumping slurry into nearby water sources. Tens of thousands of gallons of toxic waste-water are now being dumped into American rivers every day.

We also need to better appreciate the connectedness of water across state and national borders. In Minnesota, we don't spend much time worrying about running out of water. But that makes us unique. Fears about water quantity dominate debates about water policy in the American South and West. And water shortages in the United States are nothing like what

many other countries are facing. Yemen - the poorest country in the Arab world - is one of the starkest examples. Lack of water is forcing rural people into Yemen's capital city of Sana. This year alone, there were one-hundred and fifty thousand water refugees in Yemen. Sana is predicted to be the first capital city in the world to run out of drinking water in 2025.

If we don't give water quantity and quality issues our attention - they are going to get our attention soon enough.

The scale and scope of the water challenges we face are daunting. But there is evidence that our country is up to the challenge. Just look at Minnesota. On election day 2008, our family members and friends and neighbors went to the polls and passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. During one of the most uncertain moments our nation's economy has ever experienced, Minnesotans voted to pay more for clean water. That is truly remarkable.

The election last fall also brought new priorities to Washington, DC. President Obama took an important step toward refocusing attention on clean water when he nominated an EPA Administrator who is serious about restoring and protecting the public trust. In her first months on the job, Lisa Jackson has announced a new Clean Water Action Enforcement plan and said there will be a national study on the impacts of atrazine. In his first budget request to Congress, President Obama asked for a \$2.9 billion increase for the EPA. This was one of the largest increases proposed in the entire federal budget. As a Member of the House Appropriations Committee, I worked with my colleagues this year to secure those funds for the EPA and to provide Administrator Jackson the resources she needs.

Congress is also working on legislation to update the Clean Water Act and close some of its long-standing loopholes. The Clean Water Restoration Act will soon be reintroduced in the U.S. House. I have strongly supported this bill in the past and look forward to sending it to President Obama's desk. After 8 years, there is finally leadership on water policy coming from Washington, DC. But leadership from Washington, DC is not enough.

The real change will occur at the state and local level. The real leaders are going to be found in watershed districts and waste-water treatment plants. Some of the most important commitments to clean water will be made in county boardrooms and city councils. The science that will drive our decisions will come out of university laboratories, and the motivation to act will come from nonprofit advocates.

We need to build and sustain clean water partnerships that involve everyone in this room. Partnerships start with commitments. So today, I will make a commitment to all of you. I will be a partner for you in Congress. I am ready to work with you to fight for the funding, research and enforcement we need to jumpstart a new national commitment to clean water.

Clean water needs to become a national priority once again.

But the protection and restoration of our river, lakes, streams and aquifers is not done "nationally." Clean water is the result of work done one water body at a time, county by county, in every state in America. Any one of us can make a significant impact. And every one of us needs to try.

I will close with a story of how one individual made an impact this year on national water policy. This spring, Deb Swackhamer visited my office in Washington, DC to share the work the Water Resources Center was doing on endocrine disruptors. She got my attention. A few months later a bill called the National Water Research and Development Initiative Act was slated for action on the House floor. My staff and I started review the draft legislation for information on endocrine disruptors. The bill not only left out endocrine disruptors, it didn't include water quality. The legislation focused federal research on water exclusively on issues of water quantity.

We worked with Deb to draft an amendment that was almost as long as the bill itself. That amendment made water quality an equal priority with water quantity for federal research. It required research on endocrine disruptors and other contaminants of emerging concern, and it increased coordination between federal agencies and the fifty-four water research institutes around the country - including the Water Resources Center. The amendment was bold but it made too much sense to be ignored. The Chairman of the Committee accepted the entire amendment into the text of the bill that passed the House on April 23rd. I am sure Deb would not have wanted me to highlight her role in this effort. But it is one example of how the efforts of committed professionals in Minnesota are making a major difference in Congress.

We need every one of you engaged in this effort. You are the professionals. You are the experts that we will look to for answers and ideas. Whether you are a scientist, a manager or a committed citizen volunteer you all need to become advocates. There is a water crisis again in

this country - a crisis that threatens the health of America's families. This crisis is cause for action but it will not be enough to guarantee that action is taken. That is up to us.

It is time to get to work.